R E P O R T R E S U M E S

ED 016 425 FL 000 593

FOREIGN-LANGUAGE TEACHING TODAY IN THE UNITED STATES.

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PUB DATE 1 AUG 67

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.25 HC-$0.60 13P.

DESCRIPTORS- *SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING, *CROSS CULTURAL TRAINING, *LANGUAGE RESEARCH, *EDUCATIONAL INNOVATION, *EDUCATIONAL PROBLEMS, AUDIOLINGUAL METHODS, LINGUISTICS, BILINGUALISM, LANGUAGE AIDS, ARTICULATION (PROGRAM), INTEGRATED CURRICULUM, NATIONAL COMPETENCY TESTS, CULTURAL CONTEXT, LANGUAGE PROGRAMS, MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION, ERIC,

THERE ARE SEVERAL NOTEWORTHY DEVELOPMENTS AND SOME UNSOLVED PROBLEMS IN FOREIGN- AND SECOND-LANGUAGE LEARNING. INTENSIFIED INTEREST IN INCREASING NUMBERS OF SPANISH-SPEAKING INHABITANTS IN THE AMERICAN SOUTHWEST IS THE MOST VISIBLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE AREA OF SECOND-LANGUAGE LEARNING. IN FOREIGN-LANGUAGE LEARNING, WHERE THE EMPHASIS IS ON CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION, THE AUDIO-LINGUAL APPROACH IS NOW RECOMMENDED BY NEARLY ALL LEADERS IN THE TEACHING PROFESSION. SOME OF THE NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN LINGUISTICS--TRANSFORMATIONAL GRAMMAR AND FEATURE AND ASPECT ANALYSIS--ARE STILL TOO THEORETICAL TO AFFECT THE TEACHING OF GRAMMAR, BUT MANY OTHER NEW AUDIO-LINGUAL AIDS ARE ALREADY IN USE. NEW LANGUAGES ARE BEING TAUGHT IN THE UNIVERSITIES AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS, STUDY SEQUENCES HAVE BEEN LENGTHENED, AND CURRICULAR COORDINATION IS HELPING TO PROMOTE CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING. THE MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION, AND OTHER GROUPS, ARE DEFINING NEW STANDARDS OF COMPETENCE FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS. RESEARCH IS GOING ON IN SUCH RELATED FIELDS AS THE PHYSIOLOGY, PSYCHOLOGY, AND SOCIOLOGY OF LANGUAGE LEARNING, LINGUISTICS, AND THE SOCIOCULTURAL CONTEXT OF LANGUAGES. THIS PAPER WAS DELIVERED AT THE EDUCATIONAL WRITERS' SEMINAR, WORLD CONFEDERATION OF ORGANIZATIONS OF THE TEACHING PROFESSION, VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA, AUGUST 1, 1967. (AF)

ED016425

FOREIGN-LANGUAGE TEACHING TODAY IN THE UNITED STATES

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Vancouver, British Columbia
1 August, 1967

The ready availability of the factual information on my subject leaves us free, in this brief discussion, to look at just a few main developments and unsolved problems that may be of international interest. Thorough studies have in fact been made of enrollments in schools and universities, of university entrance and degree requirements, of teacher preparation and the standards for certification, and of the recent history of language-teacher education and the teaching of the commonly taught languages. All such factual material can be located by requesting the bibliographical data from the Materials Center of the Modern Language Association of America and of the new American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages ("ACTFL"), 62 Fifth Avenue, New York City 10011.

It seems useful to make the distinction between "second-language" and "foreign-language" learning: "second" meaning a language learned for the purpose of communication with one's compatriots, as Spanish is learned by Catalonians. The bulk of my subject falls in the "foreign-language" category, for most of my compatriots are native speakers of English.

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1. Professor Nostrand's advanced degrees are the Harvard M.A. and the Doctorat de l'Université de Paris. He served in

A. Second-language learning

There is currently an intensified interest, nonetheless, in the increasing number of Spanish-speaking inhabitants of the Southwest, from Texas to California. The interest is evidenced by several recent conferences on their predicament, and another conference to be held at El Paso, Texas, on November 11. The efforts to improve the educational opportunities offered to these Spanish speakers draw upon the long development of methods for teaching English to speakers of other languages. Information on this field, and on the contrastive grammars that are being written to facilitate the teaching of English and of several other commonly taught languages, may be obtained from the Center for Applied Linguistics, 1755 Mass. Avenue, Washington, D.C. 20036. One finds a growing awareness, however, that the problem of bi-lingualism is really a bi-cultural problem, and the emphasis is accordingly shifting from programs merely of teaching English, to programs whose objective is the mutual regard of the Anglo-Saxon and the Hispanic culture bearers in a community, to be achieved through understanding and appreciation of each other's heritage and life style.

1. (continued) 1944-47 as U.S. Cultural Attaché in Peru. He has received the Peruvian Government decoration, Order of the Sun, and also the French Government Palmes Académiques and Légion d'Honneur. He was a member of the steering committee for the Modern Language Association's Foreign Language Program, 1952-58, and of the Advisory Committee for NDEA Title VII (the Educational Media Program), 1958-60. He was director of one of the first NDEA Institutes in 1959, and was President of the American Association of Teachers of French, 1960-62. He has directed several research projects for the U.S. Office of Education. In 1966-67 he served as chairman of the National Education Association's National Commission on Teacher Education and Professional Standards. His publications include Le Théâtre antique (1934), Ortega y Gasset's Mission of the University (1944, 1966), The Cultural Attaché (1947), Research on Language Teaching...Bibliography (1962, 1965), Background Data for the Teaching of French (1967.

The same spirit of mutuality informs the language-education aspect of the war on poverty in the "inner-city" areas. As we work with the underprivileged we grow more and more aware that their subculture has some admirable qualities, such as the highly developed skill of reading character. We see our task here as one of extending the culture of the individual, and virtually teaching him a second language, but always as a modification rather than a supplanting of what he already possesses.

B. Foreign languages for communication

All of the main present developments in our teaching of foreign languages have been caused, at least in large part, by concern for the need to communicate with other peoples in their languages. The motive underlying this concern is some mixture of self-interest -- grown more enlightened through spreading education and a broadening international experience, -- curiosity about "strange lands and friendly faces," and the hope that closer acquaintance will result in cooperation and mutual enjoyment. The observer coming from a more pessimistic and suspicious culture finds it hard to imagine the hopefulness and friendliness that this national population exhibits and takes for granted.

1. The audio-lingual approach

The first change to develop out of the new stress on cross-cultural communication was the gradual adoption, beginning in the 1940's, of an audio-lingual beginning in the teaching of languages. This procedure is now recommended by nearly all the

national leaders in the profession, it is the intent of nearly all the teaching materials that are being published, and methods courses being taught, and it has by now been accepted, apparently, by a large majority even of the older teachers who themselves learned their foreign language by discussing it in English.

a. Modern linguistics

The audio-lingual approach needed a grammar based on the spoken language, while the grammars used for teaching until then described languages partly in terms of spelling and partly in terms of pronunciation. Structural linguistics went a long way toward meeting this need. At present, however, a wide gap separates the changing theory of language analysis from the application of linguistics to teaching. The most promising advances toward an enlightening descriptive knowledge -- transformational grammar and its refinements called feature analysis and aspect analysis -- are in a state too unsettled and at too early a stage for any routine application. The theoretical linguists are occupied in testing and comparing the alternative refinements proposed by the fertile mind of Noam Chomsky, and until they resolve the open issues at the speculative level they cannot reasonably be expected to answer the requests for help at the level of applied linguistics. Meanwhile, however, the "applied linguists" may possibly contribute both to theory and to practice by taking the portion of a language's syntax that must be taught, arranging this corpus on the model (for example) of feature analysis, and testing whether the model

achieves a new economy of description, explanatory power, comprehensibility, and pedagogical efficiency. (This is being attempted at my university.)

b. New kinds of resources

The audio-lingual approach has generated needs not only for a new grammar but also for word-frequency and syntax counts based on the conversational language, audiovisual teaching materials and equipment, and tests of proficiency in auditory comprehension and in the spoken language. These instruments are being developed rather rapidly, partly in the United States and partly in Europe, for the several languages most commonly taught in the West; such progress cannot be claimed with respect to the many other languages that ought to be taught in the United States.

2. A broadening pattern of languages

A second clear consequence of the emphasis on cross-cultural communication, in addition to the audio-lingual approach and its repercussions, is the diversification of the languages taught. The old high-school offering of Latin, French, Spanish, German and Italian, with occasional sequences in e.g. Hebrew, Polish and the Scandinavian languages in response to requests of local ethnic groups, obviously does not suffice if representatives of the population are to establish communication with the other peoples of the globe. Among the languages recently added in secondary schools are of course Russian and Portugese, and a significant beginning to reach beyond the West: Japanese, Mandarin, Arabic. A much wider variety of languages is of course taught in the universities. Latin, which until t[illegible] 1940's was the

foreign language of highest enrollment in the schools of large areas of the country, has declined sharply in popularity despite cogent pleas, unprecedentedly attractive teaching materials, and the demonstration by a few Latinists that an ancient language can be so taught as to be read as a natural language, rather than as a puzzle of written signals. The reason for the decline is partly the shift of emphasis to world communication and the abandonment of the belief that certain subjects were specific remedies for mental indiscipline. Yet the decline has been offset in the schools where teachers have exploited the audio-lingual materials and the inherent opportunity to show a time-perspective on present civilization. It is one of our unsolved problems to benefit more fully, as a people, from the study of Latin and also of classical Greek, whose first-rate literature, as a Unesco publication has observed, provides not only a perspective in time but also a certain link of seminal ideas between contemporary cultures of the East and West.

3. Lengthening language study

While the number of languages taught is rising, both in schools and in higher education, language teachers are urging with increasing success that each student continue learning one language to the point of fluency. The old custom of studying a language for only two school years, which has been a conspicuous weakness in our national education, is clearly ineffectual for the objective of communication between peoples. The lengthening of foreign-language sequences, therefore, is to be listed as a

third main result of the emphasis on communication.

The ideal is that each child should start a first foreign language early and learn it in such a way that in later life he will be able, with justified self-confidence, to teach himself any language he may need. Actually, we have failed thus far to give most of our children the advantages of FLES (foreign languages in the elementary school). Most of them do not begin a language until secondary-school age when the childhood capacity to imitate speech has deteriorated neurologically and the adolescent inhibition against speech sounds strange to the peer group is at its strongest. Our problem is to prepare FLES teachers and to persuade school administrators (educated parents are readily persuaded) that a foreign language effectively serves the development of the individual and of modern society.

4. Curricular coordination and the cultural objective

If language study is to be carried on in sufficient depth to serve these ends appreciably, the lengthening of language sequences is not enough. Language teachers in the United States are now coming to realize that we must also relate the language sequence to the other sequences in the school curriculum, notably geography and history, the social studies as they deal with culture patterns and social structure at home and abroad, English (or "language arts") in which concepts of language analysis are assimilated, and the other arts, already studied in a world perspective. Let me call these relationships with other subjects "horizontal coordination," and let me subsume this coordination

under a broader interest, the sociocultural context of the foreign language, a currently spreading interest which I believe is a fourth main consequence of the concern for cross-cultural communication.

As our perception of that objective deepens, we inevitably come to realize that the success of the communication involves more than a "message" in flight: it involves the person who conceives and encodes the message and the person who decodes and interprets it according to his understanding of the sender -- or who misinterprets it as if it belonged to the fabric of his own culture. As the new media make practicable a vivid, vicarious experience of a remote way of life, we must put with the experience a knowledge of the patterns so vividly illustrated so that the learner gains all he can of the understanding, the sensitive feeling for a people's style of life, which now takes much of a lifetime to acquire. The State of North Carolina, in new guidelines being prepared by French and Spanish teachers under the Department of Public Instruction, is spearheading a fresh advance toward definition of the sociocultural objective for each phase of the foreign-language sequence, together with ideas for coordination with the learner's developing comprehension of his home culture and social system.

5. Toward nationally accepted norms

The objectives of fluency and understanding, with the resulting longer sequences, have posed new problems in the

United States, with regard to the proficiency both of students and of teachers.

The Modern Language Association of America has catalyzed progress toward defining standards of teacher competence, first by obtaining wide agreement on a statement of subject-matter qualifications, then by devising Tests for Advanced Students and Teachers, and most recently by working out guidelines for language teacher education and certification, in cooperation with the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (NASDTEC) and with participants in a nationwide series of regional conferences. The outcome has been summarized by F. André Paquette and others in the Modern Language Journal, vol. 50 (6, October) 1966, pages 323-425. The NDEA institutes for language teachers have further advanced both the definition and the achievement of teacher competence.

Comparable progress remains to be made, however, in defining what the language learner should be expected to be capable of doing as he completes each cycle in the foreign-language sequence. Meanwhile, students are penalized and frustrated by the poor articulation between cycles, as they move from one school system to another or from secondary to higher education. The number of students affected is increasing with the rising language enrollments and the increasing mobility of families from one locality to another.

The United States has more difficulty than most countries in resolving problems of nationwide coordination, not only because of the size of the country but particularly because of our decentralized control over education. We gain so much, in fact, through local initiative and sense of responsibility than we prefer to progress by the slow device of mutual persuasion. rather than to establish a ministry of education which could decree uniformity overnight, but at the expense of the precious commitment now felt by the local school boards and school personnel, the parent-teacher organizations, the professional organizations of teachers and administrators, and many service-minded publishers of teaching materials and designers of educational equipment.

All these groups now take the sort of pride that free artisans take in their own handiwork. Our task of achieving continuity in language learning is now more feasible than ever before, however, thanks to a congeries of developments created by the realization that language learning must be carried to the point of fluency and cross-cultural understanding. First, the Modern Language Associations of America, beginning with its Foreign Language Program in 1952, has stimulated the achievement of a basic consensus on policy among modern-language teachers. Second, supervisors of foreign languages, who can catalyze the needed collective advance, have been added to the staffs of the chief state school officers and the county and city school systems. These supervisors have formed organizations of their own in order to develop and express

their recommendations of policy, and many of them have spent summers together in special institutes financed under the so-called National Defense Education Act (NDEA) of 1958. Third, the U.S. Office of Education has exerted influence, in this and other significant ways, without assuming anything like the centralized authority exerted by ministries of education. Fourth, private foundations have financed research and development. Notably, the Ford Foundation has sponsored two statewide programs, in Indiana and Washington, following out the initiative begun by the MLA in 1952; and the Washington Foreign Language Program concentrates upon the problem of defining successive levels of student achievement -- the basic advance without which we cannot solve the problem of articulation. Fifth, we are overcoming the sociological separation between the national subculture of the school personnel and the national subculture of the professors and administrators in our higher education. Mutual interest and communication between these two worlds is paving the way for the mutual persuasion through which we must articulate the succession of challenges presented to the language learner as he moves from school to college.

6. Pure and applied research

A final main development, which I ascribe in its turn to the same generating drive toward usable language competences, is the concern to develop reliable research in the physiology, psychology and sociology of language learning, in linguistics,

in instructional methods, materials, and equipment, in the teaching of literature, and in the sociocultural context of the languages to be taught. The Research on Language Teaching ... Bibliography mentioned in the footnote at the beginning of this essay showed about half as many research projects for 1962-65 as for the entire period 1945-61, and the new research reported came largely from the United States, partly because our survey was less expert for Russia and its neighboring countries. Fortunately, this bibliographizing is now being continued with much more adequate resources by two branches of ERIC (Educational Research Information Center), operated respectively by the Modern Language Association of America and by the Center for Applied Linguistics. A first installment of the MLA/ERIC serial bibliography will be published in FL Annals in the fall of 1967.

New and exciting possibilities of international cooperation lie ahead, in the desperately important task of improving language instruction and strengthening its vital contribution toward understanding and cooperation between peoples. One of the possibilities is the sharing of information about research and development. Another is the establishing of what can most truthfully be taught about each culture and social structure: this can be done in the fairest perspective through the working together of centers within and outside each country, so that the people's self-concept is rounded out by the supplementing

views from cultures of both East and West. Still another possibility for cooperation is the gradual, voluntary adoption of norms for teacher preparation and student achievement, by the process of mutual persuasion, and in response to the increasing mobility of families across national frontiers.

May I close this brief essay by expressing the hope, indeed the personal expectation, that in the years immediately ahead the Féderation Internationale des Professeurs de Langues Vivantes, the WCOTP, UNESCO, and all other pertinent entities, will discover more ways of realizing our shared aspirations than I can even dream of today, from my still very limited view of our collective potential to carry out the long-waiting hope-against-hope which Aeschylus' chorus sang in the Agamemnon:

αἴλινον αἴλινον εἰπέ, τὸ δ' εὖ νικάτω.